

Spending a day in Christian conversation

More than 160 clergy and laity from throughout the Northern Illinois Conference came together on Sept. 16 to engage in conversation digging deeper into who we are as the body of Christ and to think about the future of The United Methodist Church.

“Today we come together to talk about what it means to be the church as followers of Jesus,” said Bishop Sally Dyck, as she opened the day with prayer and scripture. “We’re not talking about human sexuality or any of the other issues that we disagree about *per se*. While these issues may come up at our tables, today we are called to really think about what it means to be the church.”

The day of conversation was held at Grace UMC in Naperville and led by retired Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader who encouraged participants to begin the conversation by looking at The United Methodist’s theological task as described in the *Book of Discipline*.

“I think a lot of people can tell who we are by what we are doing, but they don’t know why we are doing what we do,” said Bishop Rader. “What do we believe about God and about this church and how does that inform how we are going to act toward each other and the world? We need to let the theology come first.”

Bishop Rader guided the table discussions based on the book *Unity of the Church and Human Sexuality Toward a Faithful United Methodist Witness* from the General Board of Higher Education. The following four questions crafted by the Council of Bishops for discussion by United Methodists across the denomination helped guide the conversations: 1) In our diverse and global existence, what is the shared mission/purpose of the Church? 2) Is there a proactive way for us to live together despite our differences that doesn’t presume that we will resolve our differences? 3) What might be a form of unity that would empower us to live together? 4) What is our witness and what can be our witness to the world in relation to our differences?



Clergy and laity gathered at Grace UMC in Naperville on Sept. 16 to engage in Christian conferencing around some of the challenges and issues facing The United Methodist Church.

“We’ve got to figure out in The United Methodist Church what is going to be our witness and our contribution to this world,” Bishop Rader advised.

The Rev. Juyeon Jeon, pastor at Epworth UMC in Chicago, said beginning the conversation around who we are as a church instead of focusing on the issue of human sexuality was constructive.

“I think grounding us in what it means to be the church was very helpful,” said Rev. Jeon. “The church I’m serving is reconciling but it can still be difficult to start the conversation and talk about what we believe and who we are.”

Paula Schwarzwald, a lay member from Cornerstone UMC in Elgin, admitted she was apprehensive about coming to the event and wasn’t sure how the conversation would go. Schwarzwald explained that her daughter is a lesbian with a 2-year-old daughter of her own and just wants to be welcomed and find blessings in the church.

“The conversation felt so much more encouraging,” said Schwarzwald. “I left much more hopeful than I have in the past. At least here in Northern Illinois, it sounds like we are trying to find a way to coexist and to make things possible for everybody.”

The Rev. Daniel Diss, pastor at First UMC in Glen Ellyn, said although his table didn’t come to any conclusions, the participants were very careful to listen to one another. “It’s important to recognize that while we may have different points of view, we need to listen respectfully and to understand that there are hallmarks of church but they don’t have to be identical, depending on where we find ourselves.”

Bishop Dyck says there will be more time for conversations and they will be different conversations after the Commission on a Way Forward presents a preliminary report to the Council of Bishops in November, a final report next May, and the church convenes for a special session of the General Conference in 2019.

But in the meantime, Bishop Dyck encourages us to think about these questions: Why are you a United Methodist? What do you value about The United Methodist Church? How has the church transformed you?

“What does it mean to be church especially when there are so many differences and disagreements,” Bishop Dyck asked. “Is agreement the basis for being a church? Or could this be a kairos moment when we can give witness to the world that in our disagreement about very important things, we can [nevertheless] demonstrate love through our words and actions.”

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“The conversation felt so much more encouraging.”



Retired Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader led the conversation and guided participants in table talks.

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What the world needs now is

HOPE



On Sept. 20, Hurricane Maria with 150 mph winds made direct landfall on Puerto Rico leaving widespread damage.



Posts and power lines remain damaged following Hurricane Maria. Authorities have announced that restoration of power could take more than six months. Photo by the Rev. Gustavo Vasquez, UMNS.



Bishop Hector Ortiz speaks to members of the Methodist outreach brigade, who distributed food and water in the central area of Puerto Rico. Photo by the Rev. Gustavo Vasquez, UMNS.



Water and food are the most pressing needs of families living in the Jayuya area. Photo by the Rev. Gustavo Vasquez, UMNS.



Methodists distributed 200 bags of prepared food with donations and support from the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico and its ministry of social sanctity. Over 2,700 water packages donated by a community organization were distributed as well. Photo by the Rev. Gustavo Vasquez, UMNS.



From Bishop Sally Dyck:

Unraveling. Spiraling out of control. Unpredictable. Scary. What's going to happen next?

These are words or phrases I don't think I've ever spent so much time pondering before. I don't mean on a personal level but in our nation and world today.

I can't begin to make a complete list and by the time this appears, I'm fairly confident that the list will be longer and—who knows?—maybe even more devastating if that's possible.

We've had hurricanes and rains described as once in a hundred years. Earthquakes have ravaged Mexico City. Forest fires in the West, including rapidly moving fires through urban areas in Northern California where lives have been lost. Are we helpless and simply vulnerable against natural disasters?

On Oct. 2, we all woke up to the "deadliest mass shooting" in recent American history. (There have been other mass shootings like Sand Creek and Wounded Knee where hundreds were killed.) How do we begin to understand why someone would mow down people at a country and western concert? Since there weren't any of the "predictable" factors that have led to mass shootings before, I heard some people exclaiming that there was "nobody to hate!" We don't need more hate right now; we need to make our country safer from people with rapid-fire guns.

But in addition to yet another mass shooting, we also have the threat of North Korea and people have just

experienced the worst month (September 2017) for violence in Syria, claiming 3,000 lives in a country about the size of Illinois and Indiana together. Massive migration exists across the world, leading to despair for many people as they not only face a long winter ahead but years of living in refugee camps, waiting for placement.

These are acute human-made threats and natural disasters, coming one upon the other. The chronic disasters such as poverty and racism just get worse. The impact of both the hurricane in Puerto Rico and earthquake in Mexico are felt here in Northern Illinois as hundreds of people come to live with relatives after their lives and livelihoods have been destroyed.

A friend's granddaughter who was a high school senior in Puerto Rico and has come to live with family in Chicagoland now faces a disrupted and unknown future. What impact will this have on her life? And so many like her? Funds which were already tight in many Hispanic communities are now being divided between here and family and friends in Puerto Rico and Mexico.

How do we respond to these human and natural disasters, particularly the mass shooting? Did it motivate you to make a change toward what the overwhelming majority of Americans want: safe, sensible gun laws? Or did you find yourself feeling either numb to it all or even resigned to the reality that this is just the way it is? Or how did you feel as one hurricane after another pounded the communities in the U.S. and the Caribbean? Some were fearful for friends and family, but some of us might have just experienced compassion fatigue.

No matter how we feel and how it impacts us personally, it's why we all need a faith community. We need to remember that those who are suffering are our own

brothers and sisters. We need to resist "weak resignation" (as the hymn, God of Grace and God of Glory, says).

A friend of mine told me recently that other people's hope gives him hope. We can't be hopeful or motivated or able to make a difference alone; we need to be a community—and more, the body of Christ—which is lifting each other up, praying and providing support through relief and mission, and working for advocacy for a better way to live for all God's people, not just for some.

During the difficult recovery period after Maria, The Methodist Church of Puerto Rico's Bishop Héctor Ortiz Vidal encouraged all local churches to keep meeting for Sunday and weekday Bible study and prayer to "maintain our spiritual connection."

"Our local churches have to be communities of hope," he wrote. "The hope of the Gospel is much more than optimism. The hope that comes from the participation in the construction of the new 'mañana' (tomorrow), when we can transform the reality that our people are living today. We are committed to that."

What the world needs now, including me and maybe you, is HOPE. Let us be the body of Christ in the world, inspiring hope in each other and those who are suffering in our communities around the world today.

May the God of green hope fill (us) up with joy, fill (us) up with peace, so that (our) believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope! (Romans 15:13, MSG)

~Bishop Sally Dyck

Why I Am a United Methodist . . .



"I am United Methodist because mission, reaching out to others, and living out faith with your hands and hearts are core to the faith."

Rev. Dick Wisdom, Aurora District Superintendent

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away a 30-something man was dragged into a United Methodist Church. Over the course of the next three years this man aged but more importantly grew, in faith, depth, and awareness of call. The man is me and the church is Sycamore United Methodist Church in 1992. Over the next four years this community of faith would love me, teach me, and develop me into a disciple of Jesus Christ, and finally challenge me to recognize and live into a call to ordained ministry.

Raised in a different denomination, making a change was never a thought until there came a time of separation and pain dividing me from the only denomination I knew from birth.

Sycamore UMC stunned me when I entered. Expecting them to "jump" me and try to "save" me, I encountered for the first time no judgement or rejection for asking questions and wrestling with the issues of faith. Before I knew it the pastor, Rev. Kirk Reed, had me in a small group where, despite my best efforts, I lowered my guard and became vulnerable. And it changed my life.

Three years later on June 1, 1995 I was having a conversation with my Pastor trying to work through a lucrative job offer knowing that I could do it but not really having my heart in it. Pastor Kirk said to me, "It's time for you to check out candidacy for ordained ministry." The notion nagged at me and after speaking to my wife, Cheryl, I met with the District Committee on Ordained Ministry (DCOM) and started the candidacy process. A year later DCOM certified me and I started seminary.

By the grace of God I am a United Methodist, and I am grateful. A healthy United Methodist Church still welcomes people to ask questions, wrestle with issues of faith and won't judge or reject them. That is far more important and difficult than a false certainty that provides all the "answers" and will tell you if you are right or wrong on your beliefs.

I am United Methodist because mission, reaching out to others, and living out faith with your hands and hearts are core to the faith. I am United Methodist because we are a connectional system throughout the world. I am United Methodist because it is grace-based. I am blessed to be United Methodist!



"I knew that the gospel lived out in the Methodist way was my way."

Rev. Arlene Christopherson, Asst. to the Bishop/Dir. of Connectional Ministries

United Methodism is my faith home. I arrived at this destination through a series of explorations, twists and turns. Born into a "Dutch" Reformed home, a small ethnic church community, moving away from my roots was a long journey.

Declaring my call to ordained ministry as a young teen, the Reformed Church wasn't ready for women in leadership. I was told to make a course correction in no uncertain terms. Setting aside the call, I pursued a nursing degree, then psychology and finally found myself drawn back to ministry.

There was no road map for a young woman searching for a denominational home where the door was open to women in church leadership. I earned my Masters of Divinity from the Church of the Brethren Seminary,

simultaneously working in a Presbyterian Church. I courted the United Church of Christ and I took a staff position in The United Methodist Church.

With seminary graduation looming, I was faced with the need to choose. By then I had grown far from my Calvinist roots. I was grounded in the path of pacifism, the historic foundation of the Church of the Brethren. I was convinced that women could bring a dynamic voice to the pulpit and I was a strong believer in personal piety and social action.

Choosing United Methodism was daunting. The ordination process was long and slow. I didn't have the relationships, seminary ties, understanding of structure and polity. Yet, I knew that the gospel lived out in the Methodist way was my way.

Share your faith story



Bishop Sally Dyck (left) and Rev. Edgar Hiestand (right) presented the 2017 Ecumenical/Inter-religious Award to First United Methodist at the Chicago Temple's senior pastor Rev. Myron McCoy (center) on Oct. 15.

Chicago church receives Bishop's annual ecumenical/interreligious award

Bishop Sally Dyck has awarded First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple the 2017 Ecumenical/Interreligious Award for the church's many peacemaking and justice-seeking ministries.

Bishop Dyck and the Rev. Edgar Hiestand, member of the NIC Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships, presented the annual Bishop's award to senior pastor Rev. Myron McCoy during the Sunday 11a.m. service on Oct. 15.

The award recognizes the church as "a beacon for peacemaking, justice-seeking bridges, so needed in a divisive world where many do not realize their kinship in God's family."

Some of the church's ministries recognized include the Theatre-in-Residence: Silk Road Rising which was created after 9/11 in response to the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments that swept the U.S. in the aftermath of the attacks.

The Temple also long supported the Greater Chicago Broadcast Ministry which creates TV media for interreligious and Christian witness. The sanctuary is also frequently the center for many ecumenical and interfaith services.

United Methodists help, struggle amid wildfires

By Mary Jacobs

First United Methodist Church of Santa Rosa, California, was always a church that helped others in need. After wildfires tore through Santa Rosa on Oct. 9, many in the church were homeless and relying on the help of others.

Despite the damage to homes of members, the church still opened its doors as a shelter.

"We got a knock on the door at 2 a.m., and had to evacuate immediately," said the Rev. Blake Busick, senior pastor of the church. Fire embers rained down on Busick and his family as they left their home. Their home was destroyed, as were at least six homes of other church families.

Fifteen major wildfires spread across California in October, scorching over 200,000 acres and destroying more than 5,700 structures and killing more than 40 people.

"These fires take everything," said Linda Caldwell, conference superintendent for Mission Collaboration for the California-Nevada Conference. In areas affected, she added, "There's nothing left to rebuild." Witnesses have compared the devastation to the aftermath of a nuclear blast.

Church members in Santa Rosa went to bed on Oct. 8 unaware that a fire was burning near Calistoga. High winds spread the fire so quickly that evacuees were forced to flee within minutes of the first warnings.

The knock on the door came at 4 a.m. for Lindsey Kerr, associate pastor at the Santa Rosa church. By the time she arrived at the church — which thankfully was outside of the fire zone — members were already there preparing bacon, eggs and coffee. Church members turned the church into a makeshift shelter; some 98 people stayed there on Oct. 9.

After an announcement on a local radio station that

the church was open for those needing shelter, donations began arriving spontaneously — some from church members, many from strangers.

"Great people have been showing up randomly," Kerr said. She dubbed one young man who showed up with a bag of toothbrushes from Costco "the toothbrush fairy," and another resident who took clothes that needed washing became "the angel of laundry."

The church also allowed evacuees to bring pets.

"It's like Noah's Ark here," Kerr added. "We have a menagerie — birds, dogs, cats and, I think, a lizard or two."

Other northern California churches outside of the fire zone geared up quickly to provide shelter and aid for evacuees.

When members of Novato United Methodist Church learned that many evacuees — not knowing where else to go — had turned up at a local shopping mall, they devised a way to extend an invitation.

"We brought a big sign over to the mall to let people know we were open," said the Rev. Youngmi Jung, Novato's lead pastor. The church hosted about 60 people during the day on Monday and 50 overnight.

Petaluma United Methodist Church began collecting donations — bottles of water, food, clothes, toys and linens — and served as a staging operation to supply nearby shelters.

"A lot of folks we've never met before have just turned up with donations," said Richard Hillery, a lay member and chair of the trustees. "It's heartwarming."

At the conference level, leaders collected donations for health kits, coordinated other churches on standby to shelter if needed, and kept tabs on people within the connection.

At First United Methodist Church Santa Rosa, church

members face a long rebuilding process, said Busick, who responded to questions from United Methodist News Service while shopping in a nearby Target store.

"We're buying basic things, like toiletries," he said. "We had to leave so quickly that nobody took anything."

Busick noted that the congregation, which averages about 350 in weekly attendance, had just celebrated the sendoff of a mission team headed to Middletown, California, on Oct. 8.

The team planned to help rebuild homes in the wake of the 2015 wildfire there. That same morning, the congregation's scripture was the passage from Exodus recounting God's provision of manna and quail to the Israelites.

"It's a little eerie," he said. "It says that what we need today will be provided. We had no idea how much it would apply."

**Jacobs is a freelance writer living in Plano, Texas.*



A view of Senikau Momoka's house shows the extent of damage to her property after wildfires swept through California on Oct. 9. Momoka is a member of First United Methodist Church of Santa Rosa, which opened its doors to people left homeless after the blaze. Photo by Kelly Vaughn, courtesy of First United Methodist Church



Young girl's birthday presents help hurricane relief

The 8th birthday for a young member of First United Methodist Church in Arlington Heights, Ill., meant much more than gifts, wrapping paper and toys this year. Second grader Julia Raitano asked friends to buy supplies to fill cleaning buckets instead of presents for her birthday in September to help homeowners impacted by the recent hurricanes in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico.

Asked why she decided to give up presents for her birthday Julia told a Pioneer Press reporter she wanted to do something after her mom told her about Hurricane Harvey and the many people whose houses were flooded.

"It makes me feel good to be helping them and to feel needed. And those things are more important than presents for myself," Julia told the reporter.

"When my mom sent out my birthday party invita-

tions, she put in a list of all the cleaning supplies that are needed."

When asked her advice to other children who want to help she said, "they can do this, too." Church members dropped off supplies at the Raitano's doorstep and guests brought cleaning supplies to her party. They also collected more than \$400 in checks.

Julia's family then drove the 382 pounds of donations down to the Midwest Mission Distribution Center (MMDC) in downstate Chatham on Sept. 24. "They (MMDC) opened their doors to us on a Sunday and gave Julia a tour of the facility," said Julia's mom Jacqueline Raitano. "They were so nice and Julia can't wait until she's old enough to volunteer there."

That will be just a few years for Julia since MMDC volunteers must be age 11 or older.

MMDC recently sent a huge load of Hurricane Maria Relief Supplies to Puerto Rico including 576 cleaning buckets, 10,000 personal dignity kits, hundreds of blankets, and other necessities. For MMDC's most immediate needs and to donate visit midwestmissiondc.org.



Rockford District delivers cleaning buckets

Rockford District volunteers loaded a truck and delivered more than 130 full or partially-full buckets, 160 empty buckets and lids, and several boxes and bags of supplies totaling almost 2,900 pounds to the Midwest Mission Distribution Center (MMDC) on Oct. 11.

"We were truly the hands and feet of Christ," said John Stelter, Rockford District Mission Coordinator. "I can't possibly list all of the people who participated in this mission, from local church members, to the staging area folks, to the transportation team, to the warehouse staff in Chatham. It was an awesome mission event. Blessings to all of you!"

Thank you to the following churches who donated supplies:

- Belvidere: First
- Elgin: Cornerstone
- Hinckley
- New Life
- Crete
- Lanark
- Rockford: Evans
- Stockton: Wesley
- Capron
- Rockford: Aldersgate
- Rockford: Court Street
- Chemung
- Pecatonica
- Street
- Rockford: Grace
- Apple River
- Cherry Valley
- Pearl City: First
- Scales Mound
- Marengo



Commission on a Way Forward sketches new ideas to present to bishops By Heather Hahn

Council of Bishops



UMNS - The Commission on a Way Forward is sketching possibilities for The United Methodist Church's future that it will present to the denomination's bishops in November.

Commission members, meeting in Berlin, Germany in September, expressed a need for church unity while acknowledging different theological perspectives around homosexuality, according to a press release.

As with its previous meetings, the group's fifth gathering on Sept. 18-20 was open only to members, the three bishop moderators and invited guests. The group previously has said it would wait for preliminary approval from the Council of Bishops in November before unveiling any proposals.

The commission has started looking at missional and institutional models for a way forward through the denomination's impasse over same-gender marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ clergy. Those models take into consideration factors identified in the group's August status report.

"While we are exploring models of a way forward, we are sketching them with a pencil in one hand and an eraser in the other," said Florida Area Bishop Ken Carter, one of the commission's three moderators, in the press release.

He added that the commission knows United Methodists "want space from each other because of theological differences and the harm we have done to each other — and at the same time connection because this is in our DNA."

"We are the one Body of Christ with many members, and God uses this diversity to offer grace and healing to the world."

This was the first meeting the bishop-appointed, multinational commission held outside the United States. About 44 percent of the world's 12.7 million United Methodists live in central conferences — church regions in Africa, Asia and Europe.

Eleven of the commission's 32 members come from the central conferences. Specifically, seven are from Africa, two from the Philippines and two from Europe.

Meeting in Berlin was an opportunity for members from Africa and Europe to travel for shorter distances. It also helped members see the implications of their work in a non-U.S. context, the press release said.

During the meeting, commission members engaged in one-on-one dialogues, delving deeper into how the

church ministers with LGBTQ individuals. At least three commission members are openly gay.

The values that guided conversations, according to the press release, included the hope to multiply the denomination's Wesleyan witness, a call for fruitfulness and a desire for de-centralization and simplicity in church structure.

David Field, a South African native who is a theologian in Switzerland, discussed the different perspectives around the central conferences.

He also challenged members to think of the gospel from the perspective of the church's LGBTQ members.

"During this period of constant struggle, is the gospel good news to the LGBTQ community?" he said. "The gospel could only be good news if it is good news for the LGBTQ community."

The commission, authorized by General Conference 2016, is looking at new ways to be connected in a global denomination where many United Methodists view the practice of homosexuality as a sin while many others view restrictions on LGBTQ individuals as sinful discrimination.

Hortense Aka, a lay leader and psychology professor from Côte d'Ivoire, told fellow commission members during her devotion that she is "totally convinced that together we can get through this, and with the hope we have, we can get through this together."

Mazvita Machinga, a commission member and dean at United Methodist Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe, was similarly hopeful, while also urging fellow members to be sensitive to ministry contexts outside the United States.

"The meeting sees us going deeper into our mandate for finding a way forward, and I am quite optimistic that a way forward that will keep our church together is on the way," she said.

At least a few commission members also belong to other United Methodist advocacy groups that have raised the possibility that the differences on matters of marriage and ordination could be church dividing. The groups are Good News, the Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church, and the Wesleyan Covenant Association.

In two August blog posts ahead of the commission's meeting, the Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, a commission member, wrote about why he sees the denomination's teaching around homosexuality as essential doctrine.

Lambrecht is also a leader in Good News and the Wesleyan Covenant Association.

The Book of Discipline, which contains church teachings, since 1972 has stated that all individuals are of sacred worth but the practice of homosexuality "is incompatible with Christian teaching."

To affirm same-sex relationships, Lambrecht wrote, would among other things, undermine the reliability and authority of Scripture and create a church with mixed messages about marriage and sexuality.

"We would be better served by acknowledging reality and creating structural separation that would allow people to engage in ministry unhindered by continued conflict over an issue that many deem essential to the Christian faith," he concluded.

Other commission members see the dispute differently. This past September, commission members Dave Nukols of Minnesota and the Rev. Tom Berlin of Virginia helped launch a new group, called the Uniting Methodists Movement, which specifically doesn't see differences around marriage and ordination as church dividing. Field plans to address the group's Uniting Conference in November.

In the post-meeting press release, Lambrecht said he was impressed that commission members "engaged ever more deeply around the issues that divide us as well as those that unite us."

But he added that the commission still has a lot of work to do.

Heather Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service.



The Commission on a Way Forward met in Berlin Sept. 18-20. Photo by Maidstone Mulenga



PRAYING OUR WAY FORWARD

We are One in Christ
December 3-9, 2017, Isaiah 41:10

"The aim of 'Praying Our Way Forward' is to ask and listen for God's leadership."

The Northern Illinois Conference will participate in a week of "Praying Our Way Forward" the first week in December. The NIC General and Jurisdictional Conference Delegation and the United Methodist Women will partner in sponsoring this week of prayer for The United Methodist Church.

"The aim of 'Praying Our Way Forward' is to ask and listen for God's leadership at this critical time in the life of our church," said Bishop Al Gwinn, who co-chairs the initiative.

"Praying Our Way Forward" was created by the Council of Bishops as a part of their larger commitment to "lead the church in every part of the world in times of worship, study, discernment, confession and prayer for God's guidance." To achieve this mission, they invited The Upper Room to help engage every annual conference around the world. United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men and United Methodist Communications have recently joined the partnership.

Each annual conference will take one week to have intentional prayer for the mission of The United Methodist Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and for the work of the Commission on a Way Forward

The Upper Room has developed UMCprays.org, a website where spiritual leaders and intercessors can share prayers, information and resources. The site has prayer resources for individuals, families, small groups, districts, and annual conference events, as well as promotional ideas and information about the Commission members and the weekly prayer schedule.

The NIC Delegation and UMW will have sign-up sheets for local churches to use for people to pray in their congregations. They will also provide a prayer that people can use if they wish, and they will offer a daily prayer on the delegation's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/NICDelegation. Watch the eNews for more information as we get closer to December.



CELEBRATING DIVERSITY: **LOVE** IN EVERY LANGUAGE

By Laura Buchanan*

Centennial Multicultural United Methodist Church in Rockford, IL., celebrates its rich cultural diversity through an annual Taste of Centennial community event, inviting each congregant to share food, music and customs from their native lands. (Pictured left) The Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer and her husband the Rev. Mario S. Mayer celebrate their Chilean heritage.

“Globalization has changed our whole world; the world is at our doorsteps. Church is changing and neighborhoods are changing,” said the Rev. Anna Thomas of Centenary United Methodist Church in Metuchen, New Jersey. “God loves all of us. How do we share that love in this complex, diverse world?”

The myriad of cultures and languages increasingly interwoven in the fabric of the U.S. present abundant possibilities for local churches. But with those opportunities also come challenges – of the unknown, of different backgrounds and of language barriers.

God calls the church to overcome fear, to care for others and to be a community of hospitality and peace. Your congregation can become a place where people from richly diverse cultures and backgrounds come together as unified believers who all speak a common language of love.

“A multicultural, multiracial church is what the church is in the 21st century,” said Rev. Thomas.

Breaking barriers

The congregation at Centennial Multicultural United Methodist Church (CMUMC) in Rockford, Ill., incorporates people from 16 different countries, from Egypt to Sweden to Mexico. With each person coming from such diverse places around the world, finding unity could be difficult, but the church has risen above their differences of culture and language.

Churches like CMUMC have found that the most effective way of breaking down barriers of fear is to inspire people to develop relationships that encourage empathy, patience and understanding.

“We need to see that we are one. Sometimes churches are divided by language or culture, but when you feel you are one and all part of the same family... anything can happen,” said CMUMC’s pastor, the Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer.

Rev. Thomas, who is from India, agrees. Her church members represent 13 nationalities. She advises churches to “create an environment that is brave rather than safe, where people can share their stories.”

“Unless we talk to each other, we always have a fear of others. To overcome that, you have to really connect with people over food or Bible study,” she continued.

When barriers feel too strong to overcome, especially when there is no common language, patience is key.

Rev. Grandon-Mayer said, “Even though sometimes we can’t communicate [with someone], we know they are part of the congregation. Language isn’t a barrier for us; we can communicate through the language of love. We make an effort to understand and show love and tolerance.”

“You have to open your eyes and ears,” said Rev. Thomas. “Sometimes it will be difficult, but you have to be patient and able to have that understanding to sit and listen.”

Uniting in worship

Communication can be a major obstacle when it comes to worshiping as a congregation that speaks different languages, but there are ways to bridge the language gap. Different expressions of worship allow people to relate to, and participate in, the service.

Sometimes a primarily English worship service incorporates different languages through prayers, liturgy or songs. Morgan Stafford, cross-cultural strategist and ministry intern in the Tennessee Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, suggests incorporating a multilingual worship experience because many young people speak more than one language.

“A bilingual and multicultural service captures the best of both worlds. Everyone can be with their families,” he said. “It’s less about language and more about hospitality. Relationships can be built without a common language — a lot can be said with a smile.”

Some churches choose to have two services, each in a different primary language. Rev. Grandon-Mayer is fluent in English and Spanish, so she leads a worship service in each language every week; but these services are simply two expressions of worship rather than two separate congregations. CMUMC is careful to strengthen unity through frequent joint worship services and churchwide gatherings and events.

Building community — inside and out

Churches that focus on celebrating the cultures and languages represented within their membership often have enhanced opportunities to reach out.

CMUMC hosts an annual Taste of Centennial event, inviting each congregant to share food, music and customs from their native lands. The community is invited, and attendees have a unique opportunity to travel the world through taste, sound and conversation.

“It shows the community who we are... we are diverse, but we praise one God. We can love each other even though we are all different,” said Rev. Grandon-Mayer.

Partnering in ministry

Relationship-centered ministry also extends outside of the congregation. Meaningful, fruitful ministries are born when there is a willingness to connect with people and to embrace a deeper understanding of the cultures, languages, needs and abilities found in the community.

Stafford recommends an assets-based approach when discovering ministry opportunities. “It’s so important to get to know your neighbors. Churches should seek to be in relationship first rather than focusing on worship or event planning,” he said. “Ask, ‘How can we be in ministry with the community rather than for or to?’ Once the relationship is there, the engagement follows.”

CMUMC has built a strong relationship with the children in their community. For the last 25 years, they have hosted a Saturday Kids’ Club that offers food, fellowship and activities. Centenary UMC offers an all-ages Vacation Bible School every summer, where 80 diverse people come together for nightly worship, connection and a family experience.

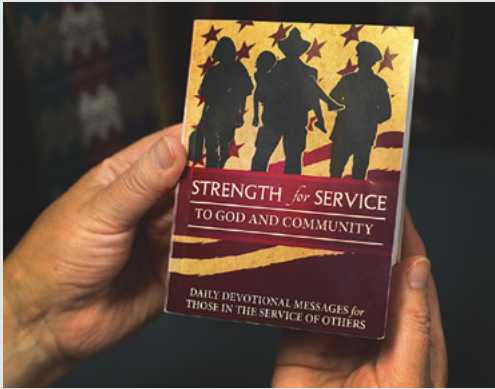
“So often the innovative work is simple: partnering with schools, inviting neighbors to church. It doesn’t require a lot of money; it takes energy and some sacrifice of time. Many hands make light work,” Stafford said.

Leading the way

Church leaders are instrumental in encouraging openness among the congregation and in setting a tone of inclusivity. Pastors and lay leaders who reflect their congregation’s diversity can also open doors to people searching for a faith home that encompasses their identity, providing a familiar place to belong and connect.

Stafford advised, “Diversity does not happen by accident. Model the change you hope to see within congregation.”

*Laura Buchanan is a PR Specialist at United Methodist Communications.



Rev. DooSoo Lee is confirming his call as an Army Chaplain.

Strength for Service helps military and first responders face challenges

By Linda Hendelman

In the course of their dedicated service, our military and first responders—armed services, law enforcement, firefighters, paramedics, and others—face challenges each day that few of us will ever know. Both those in the military and first responders find inspiration in a pocket-size book of daily devotions— Strength for Service to God and Country and Strength for Service to God and Community—published by Strength for Service, Inc. A third volume, Service to God and Community, is specifically for Boy Scouts of all ages.

“A catalytic ministry of the General Commission on United Methodist Men, Strength for Service, helps to spiritually equip those who keep us safe by providing a copy of these pocket-size books,” according to Larry W. Coppock, Project Director. The mission of Strength for Service, Inc. is “to publish and provide spiritual and inspirational literature for members of the armed services, law enforcement officers, firefighters, EMTs/paramedics and other community servants.” Strength for Service has a “rich history and tradition and has made a difference in the lives of thousands of soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen who have received the book,” Coppock added.

History

In 1942 shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Methodist Publishing House published Strength for Service to God and Country. The original publication was given to 1.6 million troops during World War II and the Korean Conflict but fell out of print in the 1950s. In 2002, some 550,000 copies were published with the help of the General Commission on United Methodist Men after a Boy Scout in 1998 discovered a worn copy that had belonged to his World War II Corpsman grandfather and arranged to have the book republished for sailors at bases near his Southern California home. The contents have been updated slightly to reflect contemporary language and culture and to add reflections and devotions from contemporary religious leaders but the new volume remains true to the original’s spirit.

Rev. DooSoo Lee

The Rev. DooSoo Lee, an elder in the Northern Illinois Conference who has been commissioned as a U.S. Army Chaplain and currently undergoing the Chaplain-Basic Officer Leader Course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, explains that an Army Chaplain serves soldiers and their families, cares for the wounded, and honors the fallen.

While many spiritual books published by different denominations and religions are available at Fort Jackson, Rev. Lee notes Strength for Service is difficult to find. He would like to spread the pocket-size volume so that as many soldiers as possible have access to it. Further, he hopes to use it for spiritual formation with soldiers in his future ministry as an Army chaplain.

Confirming his call to ministry as an Army Chaplain, Rev. Lee explains that he knows how hard and tough military life is from his own experience. An Army Chaplain is both a religious leader and an advisor as a staff officer, he says. He emphasized the importance of his experience as a pastor in local churches in the Northern Illinois Conference in seeking to become an Army Chaplain.

“If I didn’t have experience with the local churches as a pastor, I can’t imagine being a Military Chaplain,” he stated. Moreover, “the most positive and compelling support for the Military Chaplain can come from local churches,” he explained.

Strength for Service Goals

On the fifteenth anniversary of the September 11 attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, some 135 churches responded to an offer to purchase Strength for Service books and gave away 7,000 copies. Strength for Service seeks to partner with churches to provide these daily devotions to soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and first responders who bear the responsibility to keep us safe and hopes to print and distribute 100,000 of the devotional books from 2018 to 2020.

As our thoughts turn to Veterans Day on November 11, sponsoring Strength for Service’s daily devotions could be a way to honor our current military and first responders. For more information or to find how you can partner to provide copies of Strength for Service, see the website www.strengthforservice.org.



Seminary students receive excellence in clergy leadership scholarships

By Rev. Mark Meyers, NIC Board of Ordained Ministry

In 2016 the NIC Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) was approached by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) to partner with them, the Lilly Foundation, UM Foundations and UM Seminaries in a new scholarship program for seminary students, the Excellence in Clergy Leadership Scholarship.

The scholarship is designed for full-time Master of Divinity students attending one of the 13 United Methodist seminaries/schools of theology. The recipients are also certified candidates for ministry (elder or deacon) or pursuing certified candidacy in The United Methodist Church. The Excellence in Clergy Leadership Scholarship is based on merit, leadership capacity, financial need, and the recipients must demonstrate how the scholarship will help them avoid additional student loans.

The Board of Ordained Ministry agreed to use our Ministerial Education Funds (MEF) for seminary scholarships (about \$12,000 annually) to join this program in 2017 and 2018.

Applicants apply directly to GBHEM and are reviewed by them and our BOOM. This year, five seminary students from the NIC were selected as recipients of this scholarship. They were awarded a total of \$42,500.

Two students were awarded the full \$12,500.00 scholarship as they received \$2,500 from the MEF Fund, the UM Foundation endowment, GBHEM, the Lilly Foundation, and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Another student received \$7,500 and two others received \$5,000. This is a significant boost from the \$500 to \$1,000 scholarships BOOM was able to award in the past several years.

Kate Miller, a certified candidate for Deacon who will be graduating from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in May 2018, is one of the five scholarship recipients and says it is an amazing opportunity to help her complete her degree.

“As a first generation college/graduate student, with not a lot of resources to help me understand college/graduate school and finances, this has been helpful in making sure my debt doesn’t grow any larger,” said Miller. “It has helped alleviate one worry during my last year of seminary, especially after talking with someone about the best way to pay off my student debt.”

Anthony Livoti is currently a student ministry director at First United Methodist Church in Arlington Heights, Ill. He is grateful for receiving the scholarship and says it will be a tremendous help as he continues on his seminary journey.

“This scholarship is an incredible blessing that strengthens my endeavor to transform student ministry in The United Methodist Church,” said Livoti. “Through this seminary education, I will walk alongside many voices as I journey to revitalize our denomination through the power and passion of our 7th-12th grade students, who are an active and important part of our church and our world.”

Full time seminary students interested in applying for the 2018 scholarship please contact your District Board of Ordained Ministry Chair, or NIC BOOM Vice Chair Rev. Mark Meyers by email at revmarkmeyers@gmail.com early next year. Scholarship applications will be open between January 3 and March 1, 2018 at GBHEM.org/scholarshipapplication.

I encourage everyone reading this to consider supporting our seminary students through your local congregation, the MEF Fund special offering, or by planned giving through our UM Foundation.

The 2017 recipients are:

- Gloria Feliciano
- Eun Ae Lee
- Katelyn Miller
- Feltman
- Anthony Livoti
- Jinkyung Park

DYK???



Did You Know "Web Gardening"

By Rev. Arlene Christopherson, Assistant to the Bishop/Dir. Connectional Ministries

While out-of-state a few weeks ago, I turned to the internet to find a place for worship on Sunday morning. Surfing through a half-dozen United Methodist Church websites, within a radius of my hotel, I realized just how differently we all treat this evangelism tool.

The website that held my interest gave me worship hours on the home page, offered tips for visitors and included directions on parking around the downtown church. The page clearly stated the type of worship offered and gave me information about that Sunday's activities.

Having received enough information to bridge the gap between stranger and member, I felt at home even before setting foot in the building. The churches I didn't choose to visit used their home page to connect members to the latest word about the trustees meeting, choir practice and fundraisers.

Websites and church Facebook pages are an easy way to keep members up-to-date but they are a great way to inform the world of the congregation's mission and ministry. They help us reach out beyond those in the know to those seeking to know.

This fall our Director of Communications, Anne Marie Gerhardt, has been working to refresh and update the Northern Illinois Conference website. This process includes designing a new look, better organizing content, as well as refreshing and reviewing information. This is laborious work but will help in continuing to make this tool valuable to our users.

Websites can be like the file drawer at home or in your office where you keep adding those important bits and pieces of information you are sure you will need some day. With each addition the information becomes cluttered and pretty soon a search for those important documents turns into a nightmare. Eliminating "old" information when adding new, grouping content by purpose or topic will help make a website user-friendly and navigable.

I recently heard a new phrase used for web maintenance "web gardening". This is the process of weeding out and realigning the information, links, and look of your website. I love gardening. I'm not that excited about weeding. Yet when I can keep up with those unwanted plants invading my flower beds the work is so much easier. Adding to your posted materials without weeding out the clutter creates a very messy garden.

It's important to have a missional eye on the content of your website. It's helpful to refresh the look and reorganize the content every few years. It's really important to have a designated "Web Gardner" in your church. Someone who can flag outdated information, click on links and be sure they are still active. Someone who keeps thinking about how the mission of your church is being portrayed in this important tool for evangelism.

Happy gardening!

Website Tools

Looking to update or start a new website?

United Methodist Communications offers affordable web hosting services for your church, UMC branded WordPress themes, and training.

Visit umchurches.org.

For more resources and tools visit www.umcom.org/services-products/web-services.

Stay Connected

Sign up for the weekly NIC eNews & Appointment Announcements and Sympathy notices.

Visit www.umcnic.org and scroll down to enter your email and name under "Newsletter".

Job Openings

For the latest NIC job openings, visit www.umcnic.org/jobs

Submit News

Please submit items at least two weeks prior to publication date. Include your name, address, email, phone number and name of local church. Space is limited. Electronic submissions are preferred with high-resolution attached jpegs.

How to Contact Us

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER CALENDAR NEWS

EQUIP your church for transformation



Nov. 11, 2017, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Belvidere: First UMC, 610 Bonus Ave., Belvidere, IL
Speaker: Dr. Craig Kennet Miller from Discipleship Ministries

One session remains for a TeamWorks training hosted by the NIC Office of Congregational Development and Redevelopment with Dr. Craig Kennet Miller from Discipleship Ministries.

If you would like to register, contact Laura Lopez at (312) 346-9766 x724 or llopez@umcnic.org or visit www.umcnic.org/teamworks.



DAY OF CALL

Nov. 12, 2017

The Board of Ordained Ministry is encouraging each church to celebrate a DAY OF CALL. Pastors, share your own call story. Invite those

who attended seminary out of your congregation to come back or send video testimonies to utilize in worship. Offer resources for those who might be hearing the call to leadership. Go back into the history of the church and celebrate anyone who has gone into ministry out of your local church. Encourage all persons to listen to God's call in their lives, whether it is to ordained ministry or lay ministry.

For questions or to help with worship resources, contact, Rev. Jeffrey Bross, BOOM recruitment team chair, at pyropastor@gmail.com or call 630-239-2321.

Breakthrough Prayer Event

Nov. 18, 2017 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Place: Belvidere First United Methodist Church 610 Bonus Avenue, Belvidere, IL 61008
Guest Speaker: Rev. Sue Nilson Kibbey
Cost: \$ 10 (lunch) per person

Register at www.umcnic.org/breakthrough (A team must consist of the pastor plus at least five of your members, for effective training).

This workshop will provide stories, practical examples and ideas of how other UM congregations across the country have incorporated Breakthrough Prayer into daily life with innovation and impact.



Free Thanksgiving dinner for Rockford community

Nov. 23, 2017, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Location: Court Street UMC, 215 North Court St. For more information call 815-962-60601

Thanksgiving day dinner will be celebrated by more than one thousand local residents during this 36th annual, free Thanksgiving dinner.

"Everyone is welcome to attend, but we especially want the homeless and those who find themselves alone to know they are welcome to take part" said Sue Cram, Chairman of this event.

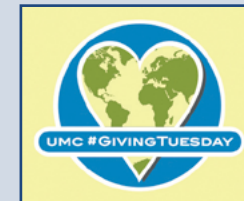
United Methodist Student Day

Nov. 26, 2017

Celebrate United Methodist Student Day on any date that is convenient for your congregation. By celebrating and promoting generosity on this Special Sunday of The United Methodist Church, you are wrapping your arms around tomorrow's Christian leaders.

Download the UM Student Day pastor's kit at www.umciving.org.

Together, we can change the lives of United Methodist students as they continue on their faith journeys.



Giving Tuesday

Nov. 28, 2017

Support the work of Advance missionaries and projects on UMC #GivingTuesday. Consider supporting a project in an

area you care about, such as food and agriculture, church development, disaster response and relief, education, health, economic empowerment, women and children, and mission personnel. Find more on UMC #GivingTuesday at

www.umcmision.org/giving-tuesday.



World AIDS Day

Dec. 1, 2017,

6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Location: Hartzell Memorial United Methodist, 3330 S. King Drive, Chicago.

Join us as we celebrate the Bishop's Appeal collection of more than \$70,000 for the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund taken at the 2017 Annual Conference. Bishop Julius C. Trimble from the Indiana Conference will be our special guest.

Shift Training Series

Dec. 20, 2017

Workshop - Worship: Event to Lifestyle

Location: The Augsburg Room at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American (ELCA) Churchwide Ministries Center 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago
Cost: \$20 (lunch and Workbook, per workshop)

Discover the tools and methods to move your congregation into healthy church systems that create a new way of doing life together. Learn how to make the shifts from:

- Fellowship to Hospitality
- Worship as an event to Worship as a Lifestyle
- Membership to Discipleship
- Serve Us to Service
- Survival Mentality to Generosity

For more info visit: www.umcnic.org/th-event/shift